

## April is alcohol awareness month

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You may have seen reports of increased alcohol sales as people are stocking up on grocery items and looking for ways to relax and de-stress. As April is Alcohol Awareness Month, this is a good time to reflect on how alcohol affects our lives, and to consider if it should be part of a healthy response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alcohol may appear to temporarily lower stress: it is a sedative and depressant that slows brain functioning, allowing you to take your mind off stressful events. The truth is alcohol changes levels of brain chemicals and can disrupt sleep patterns, which can actually increase feelings of anxiety the day after drinking.

[Drinking alcohol does not protect you against COVID-19](#). Alcohol use can actually [lower your immune system](#), making you more susceptible to diseases, like the coronavirus. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, good nutrition, and adequate sleep increases overall health and feelings of well-being.

Parents and caregivers, you can be a positive role model for your children and teens by limiting drinking in front of them and by keeping alcohol stored in a locked and out-of-reach area. Parents are the number one influence on youth's decision not to drink (yes, they do listen!). Parents can support delay of alcohol use in their children by having reoccurring conversations about not drinking, setting and discussing family values and expectations, and taking time to bond as a family. For more information, visit [StartTalkingNow.org](http://StartTalkingNow.org).

This "new normal" has added stress and anxiety to many of our lives. Some ways to model [healthy lifestyle choices](#) include yoga, meditation, physical activity, and [finding ways to connect](#) with the people you care about.

Sometimes self-care activities are not enough, and that is ok. If you or a loved one is struggling emotionally or in crisis, know there is help. Call your doctor's office, [your county's crisis line](#) or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255. You can find more mental and emotional well-being resources at [coronavirus.wa.gov](http://coronavirus.wa.gov).

The "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order can be lonely and has disrupted our normal social network. This is especially true for people in treatment or recovery of alcohol use disorder. [Virtual and online group meetings](#) are available (here's a list from the [Olympia area](#)), including the 24-hour [Washington Recovery Helpline](#) that can be reached by phone or text at 1-866-789-1511.

It is ok to feel stressed, anxious and lonely during these times. Resources are available to you. The [Washington State Employee Assistance Program](#) has developed a free, confidential program to promote health, safety, and well-being of public employees.

We're all in this together!